The Behavioral Science of Eating

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The Behavioral Science of Eating: Encouraging Boundary Research That Has Impact

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ABSTRACT Boundary research can be risky, but it can also move academic disciplines into wider areas of influence. Fittingly, this new journal's mission is to expand the boundaries of consumer behavior and to deepen its impact. Each issue focuses on having an impact both in consumer research and beyond. In the context of the behavioral science of eating, we outline the process for recruiting papers and coaching them through the review process so that authors think more precisely about the impact they want to have and think more broadly about how it illustrates a larger impactful theme.

The behavioral science of eating has typically been an area of boundary research—it operates at the intersection of multiple disciplines and has often been applied (Wansink and van Ittersum 2016). In contrast, most traditional research in academic journals is centrist. It focuses on research questions that are central to the evolution of a field. Diffusion theory, behavioral decision theory, and regulatory focus are just a few centrist topics that inspired dozens of field-changing dissertations and articles in marketing. Yet not all started out as centrist. Many started on the periphery or boundary of what was then fashionable. Over time, however, they moved from the fringe to the focus.

This new journal's bold mission is "to broaden the intellectual scope and interdisciplinary influence of the Association for Consumer Research (ACR)." With each new thematic issue, a specialized area of research—often boundary research—can be directed to have an impact on our field and beyond (Huber 2016). Being able to focus a critical mass of papers in one meaningful direction offers an unparalleled opportunity for all of the areas of boundary research we lament have been either overlooked or underresearched (Mick 2005).

Here we outline the process for recruiting papers and coaching authors through the review process. We specifically show how to help authors think more precisely about the impact they want to have and think more broadly about how their discoveries illuminate a larger theme. We believe it was a successful process that could be adapted as a model to encourage similar boundary research in future special issues.

BUILDING A SPECIAL ISSUE: FINDING THE COMPLEMENTARY CONTRIBUTION

With this first special issue of the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* (*JACR*), it was critical to clearly articulate the (1) substantive, (2) theoretical, and (3) methodological boundaries related to the behavioral science of eating before the call for papers was crafted and sent out. The title—"The Behavioral Science of Eating"—was intended to be both specific and vivid enough to help potential authors imagine themselves being part of a championship team. To better help them visualize their article in this issue, we included specific hypothetical titles to illustrate the breadth of papers that would fit this issue and to illustrate the quality and tone of the journal (see app. A, available online).

There were two other features in the call for papers that would later prove to have attracted authors who would have otherwise not submitted. One was the request for different forms of papers (other than standard research articles), such as meta-analyses, review papers, principle commentaries, and research briefs. A second appealing feature was a weekend workshop retreat and the coaching and support it implied.

The Call for Papers

One month prior to the general call for papers, about 50 scholars from marketing and from related social science

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fields were approached with a preliminary call for papers, and they were encouraged to submit their best work to our special issue. These individual e-mails were personalized, and many were followed by phone calls. We also encouraged them to forward the call for papers on to former doctoral students and to coauthors. If interested, we offered an option to submit an abstract of a potential paper so that an initial assessment of fit or appropriateness could be made.

Before finalizing and distributing the call for papers, a simple website presented a preliminary draft of the call for papers, the timeline, contact information, photos, and a hypothetical draft of the cover of the journal (http://foodpsychology.cornell.edu/jacr). Since there was not going to be an official *JACR* website until 6 weeks later, this website made this initial issue seem more real if someone searched for its name on the web. Indeed, the website received over 500 visits the day the call for papers was announced. In parallel, a Facebook page (http://facebook.com/jacreatingissue?fref=ts) was developed, and academic colleagues from ACR and other organizations (such as AMA and the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior) were invited to join.

On the day when the call for papers was announced on the ACR website (see app. A, available online), it was also announced through listservs in marketing, consumer behavior, economics, psychology, food science, nutrition, public policy, hospitality, and sociology. In the end, however, most of the nonmarketing scholars in our issue are ones we personally contacted.

Reviewers and Reviewing

Within the 4-month window between the call for papers and the submission deadline, 32 articles were formally submitted (a couple dozen abstracts and inquiries were declined prior to submission). Following the initial submissions, the articles were read by the editors and sorted into three groups: those that would be sent for review, those that would not, and those which were "high risk but potentially high return" (Rust 2006).

Authors whose articles were not sent for review received letters explaining why, and they were provided with two or three specific target journals that we thought would be a better fit. For those articles that were high risk, authors were contacted with our concerns and a set of changes they could make if they subsequently wanted to resubmit the article for review. The remaining group of manuscripts was sent out for review.

All articles were sent to at least one expert reviewer on the *Journal of Consumer Research* (*JCR*) editorial board. Depending on the nature of the article, the second reviewer would also have extensive experience reviewing for such journals as the *JCR*. Given the nature of boundary research, however, a number of other articles required reviewer expertise in different fields. For example, one submission (by a highly regarded consumer behavior researcher) proposed a fascinating spiritual approach to the behavioral science of eating. Two expert reviewers outside the field, one who was an endowed professor of religious studies, offered extensive feedback but recommended the article not be accepted for further consideration. As a second example, the lead article in this issue examines the relationship between feelings of hunger and postmeal blood glucose (Gal 2016). While the paper received a favorable review from a consumer behavior scholar, the second reviewer was a medically trained scholar who was critical of the article. After numerous revisions and numerous interactions with this medically trained reviewer (and with a third reviewer in the same field), the article was accepted, and this reviewer was asked to write a commentary (Corpeleijn 2016).

THE PAPERS: WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THIS ISSUE?

As a result of the process described above, this cohesive issue of papers and commentaries is organized into three substantive areas (fig. 1). The first area investigates the physiological and psychological sources of the hunger and satia-

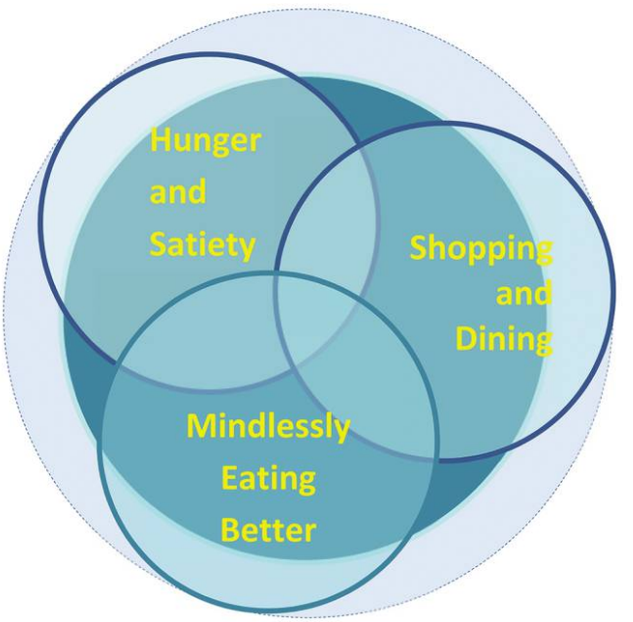

Figure 1. Substantive domains of *JACR* volume 1, issue 1.

tion. The second examines the impact of shopping and dining environments on eating choices. Finally, the third area explores the impact of mindlessness on eating decisions, where habitual or automatic behaviors preclude thoughtful consideration. Table 1 characterizes the major findings of each article and its larger theme, and it summarizes the theoretical, empirical, substantive, and practical relevance for practitioners or policy makers.

The first substantive domain expands the scope of the behavioral science of eating by focusing on the physiological drivers of hunger and satiety. It begins by focusing on how feelings of hunger can be explicitly tied to blood glucose levels (Gal 2016) and can bias why and when consumers eat. It then shows how different cues influence physiological feelings such as satiation and taste. Suher, Raghunathan, and Hoyer (2016) show that marketing cues such as health labels may influence satiation, and Jami (2016) demonstrates how psychological cues—such as mirror-induced self-awareness—change how much people enjoy food. This first section ends with an overlooked consequence of satiety—food waste, a significantly understudied but relevant and rich research area.

The second substantive topic focuses on shopping and dining environments. Reimann, MacInnis, and Bechara (2016) present a novel strategy that can stimulate consumers to replace part of their food order with a small nonfood item (think McDonald's Happy Meal). Besides introducing a new way of thinking about how to combat obesity, the article also is among the first to use fMRI scans to offer evidence for the proposed mechanism. The article by Peters et al. (2016) may be categorized more centrist than boundary, and it describes how changing food defaults in children's meals at Disney World changed sales. The third article analyzes supermarket purchase data to examine the potentially detrimental effects of nutrition labels in healthy food categories (Elshiewy, Jahn, and Boztug 2016). Next, Wilson (2016) argues for more research in food pantries and with underserved and vulnerable consumers. The last article shows how combining two dissimilar empirical findings from the literature—portion size effects and table size effects—may reveal new directions for future research (Davis, Payne, and Bui 2016).

The third substantive domain focuses specifically on how the mindless nature of many eating decisions can either distort or be harnessed to enable consumers to better control their food intake. One powerful way of pushing the boundaries of research forward is by conducting meta-analyses of published empirical studies in order to help reconcile conflicting findings. Holden, Zlatevska, and Dubelaar (2016) demonstrate that the effect of plate or bowl size on the amount of food served and consumed depends on whether the consumer is observed or not. They discovered that plate studies have shown large effect sizes in the field but not in lab studies (where people often knew they were being observed). Block, Williamson, and Keller (2016) demonstrate that paper plates influence the amount of food served, consumed, and wasted, and Szocs and Biswas (2016) showed how the choice of a spoon or fork influences calorie perceptions and possibly food intake. Last, Pham, Mandel, and Morales (2016) close the special issue showing how dieters exhibit reactance in response to well-meant advice about foods they are about to choose and how this presents a powerful lesson for food and policy activists.

Each of these articles expands existing boundaries in one way or another—some because of their context, some because of their method, and some because of their application and potential for tangible impact. We are proud of the articles in this issue, and we are pleased with the process we used to encourage the authors to think more precisely about the impact they wanted to have and to think more broadly about how they connect to the other articles in this special issue. Below we share the specific steps we used to help coach the author teams.

THE PROCESS: MOVING FROM CRITIC TO COACH

Accepted papers are not always impactful. If not read, used, or cited, a paper will have little impact. How does a paper move from being acceptable to being impactful? Ironically, the review process does not always help (Pham 2013). Its critical nature can make us lose focus and lose our voice, partly because a blind and faceless review process can raise personal anxieties of whether we will make the cut and be acceptable. Too often authors first focus on managing the review process, and *then* focus on the impact of the research.

When our call for papers for "The Behavioral Science of Eating" was announced, it was also stated that three months after the submission deadline (and after the first round of reviews was completed), all authors who had been invited to revise their paper would be invited to a weekend workshop retreat at Cornell (see app. B, available online). The primary objective of the workshop retreat was to provide intense collective feedback to enhance the potential impact of each paper. For some, this retreat might serve to clarify the message or positioning so it gets cited in a crowded research area (Meyer 2015). For others, it might help craft a

Table 1. Illustrations of Research Conclusions and Their Larger Theme

Topic/Title	Key Findings	Implications	Type of Contribution[a]	The Larger Theme
Hunger and satiety:				
"Let Hunger Be Your Guide? Being Hungry before a Meal Is Associated with Healthier Levels of Postmeal Blood Glucose" (Gal 2016)	Postmeal blood glucose is highest when people are not at all hungry and relatively lower when people are moderately hungry or very hungry. When people are very hungry, postmeal glucose is not lower and possibly slightly higher than when people are moderately hungry.	*Skip dinner if you're not hungry*: eating when not hungry causes your blood sugar to spike.	• Substantive • Theoretical • Empirical	Eating according to internal versus external cues
"Does Hunger Manipulate Glucose Levels, or Do Glucose Levels Make You Eat?" (Corpeleijn 2016)	Commentary on Gal (2016)		• Theoretical	
"Eating Healthy or Feeling Empty? How the 'Healthy = Less Filling' Intuition Influences Satiety" (Suher, Raghunathan, and Hoyer 2016)	People order greater quantities of food, consume more of it, and are less full after consuming a food portrayed as more versus less healthy. Highlighting the nourishing aspects of healthy food reverses consumers' intuitions.	*Don't call it healthy*: you overeat food called "healthy" because you think it's less filling.	• Theoretical • Empirical	Addressing the unconscious drivers of overconsumption
Reflections on food waste:				
"Household Food Waste Behavior: Avenues for Future Research" (Porpino 2016)			• Substantive • Theoretical	
"Waste Not, Want Not: Can Consumer Behavior Research Help Reduce Food Waste?" (Guthrie 2016)			• Theoretical	
"Why Do We Waste So Much Food? A Research Agenda" (Van Doorn 2016)			• Substantive • Theoretical	
"Healthy Reflections: The Influence of Mirror-Induced Self-Awareness on Taste Perceptions" (Jami 2016)	The presence of a mirror can make unhealthy food less tasty by increasing self-awareness. After eating unhealthy food in front of a mirror, individuals experience the discomfort of acting against the standards of healthy eating.	*Mirrors = mindfulness*: kitchen mirrors increased enjoyment of food.	• Empirical • Theoretical	Improved self-awareness

Shopping and dining:				
"Can Smaller Meals Make You Happy? Behavioral, Neurophysiological, and Psychological Insights into Motivating Smaller Portion Choice" (Reimann, MacInnis, and Bechara 2016)	Offering consumers the choice between a full-sized food portion alone and a half-sized food portion paired with a small nonfood premium motivates smaller portion choice because both food and the prospect of receiving a nonfood premium activate a common area of the brain (the striatum), which is associated with reward, desire, and motivation.	*Happy meals can be healthy meals*: brain scans show small prizes keep you happy when eating less food.	• Substantive • Theoretical • Empirical • Relevance	The commensuration of happiness
"Using Healthy Defaults in Walt Disney World Restaurants to Improve Nutritional Choices" (Peters et al. 2016)	A retrospective study of kid's meals purchased at Walt Disney World demonstrates that healthy defaults reduced calories (21.4%), fat (43.9%), and sodium (43.4%) for kid's meal sides and beverages.	*Disney helps diets*: when juice and fruit became defaults, Disney World–goers ate 11%–42% more.	• Relevance • Empirical	The opportunities and boundaries of changing defaults
"Seduced by the Label: How the Recommended Serving Size on Nutrition Labels Affects Food Sales" (Elshiewy, Jahn, and Boztug 2016)	Following the introduction of nutrition labels, sales increased in the healthy (but not in the unhealthy) category for products with smaller recommended serving sizes, suggesting that nutrition labels can stimulate sales of unhealthier food serving sizes.	*Read carefully*: per-serving calorie labels can lead to mindless overeating.	• Empirical • Relevance	Boundaries and prospects of consumer education
"Making Small Food Units Seem Regular: How Larger Table Size Reduces Calories to Be Consumed" (Davis, Payne, and Bui 2016)	The unit-size effect amplifies when food is placed on a larger frame (table). Specially, people consumed fewer calories when smaller versus larger regular-sized pizza slices were placed on a larger table.	*Slice smaller*: smaller potions (and bigger tables) lead to smaller meals	• Empirical	Mindless eating
"When the Cupboards Are Bare: Nudging Food Pantry Clients to Healthier Foods" (Wilson 2016)	This paper suggests that clients at food pantries deal with a number of factors that can lead to a less healthy choice and that simple adjustments in the pantry may help improve that choice.		• Substantive	Consumer vulnerability and choice
Mindlessly eating better:				
"Whether Smaller Plates Reduce Consumption Depends on Who's Serving and Who's Looking: A Meta-analysis" (Holden, Zlatevska, and Dubelaar 2016)	A meta-analysis of 56 studies from 20 papers shows that varying the size of the container holding food (e.g., plate or bowl) has a substantial effect on amount self-served and/or consumed, especially when participants are not observed.	*Use small plates*: halving your plate size cuts self-serving and consumption by 30% (but only when researchers are not watching).	• Theoretical • Relevance	Small steps toward overcoming obesity

Table 1. (*Continued*)

Topic/Title	Key Findings	Implications	Type of Contribution[a]	The Larger Theme
"Of Waste and Waists: The Effect of Plate Material on Food Consumption and Waste" (Williamson, Block, and Keller 2016)	Plate disposability influences the amount of food wasted. More food served on disposable plates is wasted than when the same food is served on permanent plates.	*The less fancy the plate, the less you'll eat*. We may eat the least off paper plates.	• Substantive • Empirical	Resolving the waste-waist dilemma
"Forks over Spoons: The Impact of Cutlery on Calorie Estimates" (Szocs and Biswas 2016)	Eating with a spoon (vs. a fork) leads consumers to estimate the number of calories in the food as being lower, and also to desire a greater volume of the food.	*Forks over spoons*: forks (vs. spoons) make you overestimate calories.	• Empirical	Subconscious influences on the food consumption experience
"Messages from the Food Police: How Food-Related Warnings Backfire among Dieters" (Pham, Mandel, and Morales 2016)	Dieters who see a one-sided message focusing on the negative aspects of unhealthy food (vs. a one-sided positive or neutral message) increase their desire for and consumption of unhealthy foods. Dieters who see a two-sided message (focusing on both the negative and positive aspects of unhealthy food) are more likely to comply with the message, thereby choosing fewer unhealthy foods.	*Avoid negative messages*: telling dieters to "Don't eat cookies" can double how much they eat. Use 2-sided messages instead.	• Substantive • Empirical • Relevance	Government intervention and freedom of choice
"Commentary: Diet, Despotism, and the Dialectic of Denial" (Katz 2016)	Commentary on Pham et al. (2016)			

[a] While individual articles may offer contributions on multiple dimensions, we decided to highlight the most valuable one in this table. We hereby differentiate by contributions that are novel and expected to broaden the intellectual scope and interdisciplinary influence of the Association for Consumer Research. We differentiate between four types of contributions: (1) Theoretical, (2) Empirical, (3) Substantive, and (4) Practical relevance (for consumers, practitioners, or policy makers).

repositioned "takeaway," so that it resonates with consumers (Huber 2008). For still others, it might augment a dissemination strategy that puts their findings into the hands of policy makers (Shimp 1994).

To this end, four exercises were designed to help each author team rework their paper in a way that built momentum to their clearest and most defensible conclusion. These exercises included: (1) conducting two-point reviews, (2) brainstorming a clear and compelling new title, (3) crafting, rehearsing, and filming party pitches, and (4) agreeing upon "The Larger Theme" for each paper.

(1) *Conducting two-point reviews*. All of the authors of the 13 "revise and resubmit" papers were invited to the workshop retreat, and 10 of the author teams (18 people in total) attended. Before arriving, they were asked to visualize the specific type of impact they wished their paper would have, and they were asked to read each of the 13 papers in enough detail to provide two suggestions for improvement.

Asking 18 people to provide detailed comments on 13 papers is unrealistic; however, asking these same people to read or skim these papers well enough to provide two suggestions for improvement worked well. Those two comments could be detailed (such as theoretical concerns, missing analyses, or inconsistencies) or they might be superficial ("Figure 2 doesn't make sense" or "Study 3 seems irrelevant"), but nearly all provided important guidance.

The purpose of two-point reviews is not to replace an additional round of detailed reviews, but in all but four cases, it did. Each author team left with 36 peer suggestions about how to improve their paper. Instead of getting comments from three reviewers and two editors and viewing these comments as picky or unnecessary, they could now see the same comments coming from well-meaning peers. They became even more motivated and earnest in making changes.

To help reviewers be brutally honest, the two points from each reviewer were presented anonymously to each author team. Reviewers wrote their comments on $4'' \times 6''$ index cards. One of the editors sorted the cards and read the comments, starting with the title and moving through the body of the paper (title, abstract, introduction, positioning background, method, results, tables and figures, discussion limitations, or references). While reading them, the authors could ask either for clarification or for feedback on whether this was a general concern with the larger group. This powerful exercise showed that many of the changes were often agreed upon and not simply a stylized view of a cranky reviewer (or impatient editors). For their next revision (due in 2 months), they needed to address the 36 points made by the workshop participants (for a breakdown of this issue's timeline, see table 2).

Table 2. An Illustrated Timeline

Date	Activity
April 2014	Invitation for editorship
May–July 2014	Preparation of call for papers
	Discussion of potential contributors
	Selection of potential reviewers
August–September 2014	Develop a dedicated website and Facebook page
	Develop and test online submission system
October 2014	Personal call for papers (selected scholars)
October 2014	Public call for papers (ACR conference)
January 31, 2015	Deadline for initial manuscript submissions
	Papers are read by editors and put under review
March 2015	Initial editorial decisions
May 1–3, 2015	Workshop retreat at Cornell in Ithaca, NY
July 1, 2015	Deadline for revised manuscripts
	Invitations for commentaries
August 1, 2015	Conditional acceptance decisions
September 1, 2015	Deadline for final manuscripts
October 1, 2015	Final manuscripts and ordering provided to publishers
January 1, 2016	Issue is published

(2) *Brainstorming a clear and compelling new title*. Prior to arriving at the workshop retreat, all authors were asked to select three favorite papers they believed were effectively well-titled. During this portion of the workshop, we analyzed these papers and listed the different tactics and literary devices that made these titles so effective (Robbins and Wansink 2016).

Following this, authors were given another index card and asked to write down their best idea for a title for each paper using any of the techniques and devices listed earlier as aids. The cards were anonymously collected, and we voted on which of the titles we liked the most. After the voting, the authors discussed the top-voted titles, mentioned any misgivings or modifications, and then changed or did not change their title as they thought best.

(3) *Crafting, rehearsing, and filming a "party pitch."* At a party or reception, most people know how to tell a short

anecdote so that it is at least somewhat engaging. We know that effective stories need a relevant beginning, an engaging middle, and a useful, interesting, or amusing conclusion. Yet few of us think of our papers that way. We do not really look for a relevant beginning, nor a way to make the middle of it engaging, nor do we usually have a "ta-da" conclusion or takeaway.

After watching four 2-minute video news releases, we listed what was effective or ineffective with each of the four (e.g., http://youtube.com/watch?v=oJ0y9CUOao4). Given these lists as guidelines, each author team developed a 1–2 minute "party pitch" (or elevator speech) about their research. These were rehearsed, taped, replayed, discussed, and reshot. In the process, authors were able to clarify what they could also do in editing their paper to make the beginning more relevant, the middle more engaging, and the conclusion more memorable. These pitches were then edited into video news releases and were subsequently provided to journalists and bloggers as each article was prepublished online (they can be found at http://foodpsychology.cornell.edu/jacr).

We condensed the conclusions of these papers, and how they supported each other was condensed within an infographic shown in figure 2. To build interest in the rest of the papers in the larger "The Behavioral Science of Eating" issue, each author was encouraged to electronically share the infographic through social media or e-mail it directly to people who they thought would be interested in their paper or in the entire issue. They were also encouraged to provide the infographic to their university's press office, so it could be shared with journalists and generate wider interest in the other articles in the issue.

(4) *Agreeing on a larger theme for each paper*. Centrist researchers are generally clear on how their research fits within a larger picture. With boundary research, this is much more difficult. For them, it is easy to mistakenly focus on an article's unusual *context* and not see the true contribution. Consider the paper by Pham, Mandel, and Morales (2016) about how dieters respond to negative messages. Viewing this as a "diet paper" would lead people to miss how this paper cleverly illustrates a much larger theme: the role of government and freedom of choice. Once these larger themes are articulated, boundary research articles can be seen as making a much larger contribution to a larger body of work.

Unfortunately, many boundary research papers do not clearly articulate the larger theme to which they contribute. They relegate themselves to a specific context or to a mid-level theory. Yet more successful papers take a clear finding or theory and show how it relates to a larger theme that has clear implications for theory, application, or policy.

To generate larger themes, each researcher was asked to write 2–4 pages that characterize the larger issues raised by their paper. To help them accomplish this, we asked them to imagine that they were going to edit a special issue of *JACR* and that their paper was going to be the lead paper in the journal. Based on this, we asked them to write down the other topics or articles that they could also imagine being in that issue and that would compliment—but not duplicate—their article. By doing this exercise and then discussing their larger theme with the group, it helped them write the "larger theme" sections you will read in the papers (recall table 1).

CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE IN 2026?

Most regular issues of journals are filled with the best individual papers available for that journal at the time. Because each paper is the equivalent of a first-round draft choice, each of the 10–15 papers can stand on its own. There is no intended synergy with the other articles in the issue. From an editor's perspective, there is no need for complementarity, coordination, or community.

Special issues of journals—like *JACR*—are different. With *JACR*, the mission is "to broaden the intellectual scope and interdisciplinary influence of ACR." The goal is not to recruit a team of unrelated first-round draft picks. The goal is to win the Olympics. One way to attempt this is to pull together visionary, provocative, and edgy research and to pair it with high-profile commentaries from outside the field (see app. C, available online, for lessons learned in editing this special issue). In this way, the journal succeeds if each paper has even more of an impact than authors had hoped (see the authors in app. D, available online). It could be through changing the actions, strategies, or policies of consumers, companies, or countries. It could be through changing the research dialogue and moving a boundary research area from being idiosyncratic to impactful.

There are many ways to define success, such as how widely a paper is read, cited in the media, or used in policy. These might be partly visible to an author, but they would not be visible to us. But one objective measure that is very visible is the number of academic citations a paper receives in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). As a benchmark, 10 years after being published, most papers in the

Figure 2. *JACR* volume 1, issue 1: "The Behavioral Science of Eating."

regular issues of top journals will have received a total of 30–50 citations. Having been cited 100 times in 10 years, for example, would be atypically high for most papers in top social science journals. But unlike a regular issue of a journal, *JACR* has the opportunity to coordinate a team of ideas and focus them all on having impact in one meaningful direction.

How will we know if this issue of *JACR* is ultimately a success? If any seven of these articles have been cited 100 times by 2026, this issue will have been an unqualified success in our minds. It would be a signal that the behavioral science of eating was a boundary research area that went from fringe to focus.

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